

MEDIA UPDATE: July 20

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—ALASKA NATIONAL GUARD NEWS—

1. Local church leaders hold online meeting to pray for healing racial division

U.S. Air Force by Alaska National Guard Public Affairs/July 16

A body of church leaders across Alaska collaborate for prayers during a Zoom meeting on July 16, 2020. The meeting participants touched on topics of racial reconciliation in response to the racial tensions across the state and nation. The Alaska National Guard stood in solidarity with the group, with State Command Chaplain Richard Koch participating.

Video: <https://www.af.mil/News/Radio/video/760003/dvpTag/Chaplain/>

Also at: <https://www.dover.af.mil/News/Video/video/760003/>
<https://www.hqmc.marines.mil/?videoid=760003>

Read full print story: <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/374056/local-church-leaders-hold-online-meeting-pray-healing-racial-division>

2. Alaska Air National Guard rescues injured hiker at Hatcher Pass

National Guard by David Bedard/July 16

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF RICHARDSON, Alaska – Responding to a rescue request from Alaska State Troopers for a hoist-capable helicopter, the Alaska Air National Guard's 176th Wing rescued an injured hiker at Hatcher Pass July 14.

Six pararescuemen from the 212th Rescue Squadron boarded an HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopter from the 210th Rescue Squadron to respond to the injured hiker, who was isolated on a grassy ledge, said Alaska Air National Guard Master Sgt. Heidi Gould, Alaska Rescue Coordination Center controller.

After locating the hiker, the helicopter landed above the hiker and the pararescuemen rappelled down to stabilize the hiker and secure the area. The hiker was packaged and roped up to the helicopter.

The hiker was transported to Providence Alaska Medical Center and released to medical personnel there.

For this mission, the 210th and 212th rescue squadrons and the AKRCC were awarded one save.

Link: <https://www.nationalguard.mil/News/Article/2276520/alaska-air-national-guard-rescues-injured-hiker-at-hatcher-pass/>

3. Rock climber injured, hoisted to safety after 25-foot fall at Hatcher Pass

KTVA by John Thompson/July 16

A rock climber was rescued from a ledge at Hatcher Pass Tuesday afternoon by members of the Alaska Air National Guard's 176th Wing.

A dispatch reports that Alaska State Troopers responded to the area of Hatcher Pass near the end of Archangel Road in Palmer at roughly 3:30 p.m. According to troopers, the climber fell more than 25 feet, landing on a ledge 60 feet above ground.

Troopers requested assistance from Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson's Rescue Coordination Center, as a hoist rescue was needed to safely remove the injured climber.

Six pararescuemen from the 212th Rescue Squadron were dispatched in an HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopter, Alaska Air National Guard Master Sgt. Heidi Gould said in a release from the guard.

The helicopter landed at a higher altitude from where the person was stranded — allowing rescuers to rappel down — before roping the injured person in.

Troopers say the injured climber was rescued around 9:30 p.m. and taken to Providence Alaska Medical Center in Anchorage with a non-life-threatening neck and back injury.

Link: <https://www.ktva.com/story/42378205/rock-climber-injured-hoisted-to-safety-after-25foot-fall-at-hatcher-pass>

Video footage: 212th and 210th Rescue Squadron Airmen rescuing an injured hiker at Hatcher Pass July 14, 2020. Video and link courtesy Must Read Alaska. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aVoAwpaH8ZU>

—ALASKA NEWS OF INTEREST—

4. Alaska's daily coronavirus count surges to new high driven partly by seafood industry outbreaks

ADN by Zaz Hollander, Annie Berman/July 20

Alaska on Monday reported a daily high in new coronavirus infections with 141 cases in residents and nonresidents, a spike driven partly by a large outbreak aboard a seafood industry trawler and a smaller cluster associated with a Juneau fish processor.

Alaska's lucrative fishing grounds draw thousands of fishermen and processing workers. Under plans submitted to the state, seafood companies are required to test employees, often multiple times, and enact quarantine protocols to keep the virus from spreading to small communities with limited hospital beds, if any.

The new cases also included 52 confirmed infections among Anchorage residents alone, according to the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services COVID-19 dashboard. One nonresident also tested positive in Anchorage. Officials say people in their 20s account for the largest number of new cases.

Health officials last week issued warnings about future intensive care unit capacity if increasing counts continue at this pace.

Many of the new cases came via broad screening of seafood employees, and it wasn't clear how many of the COVID-19 infections reported Monday were in people with symptoms when they got tested. Sicker patients bring the potential to overwhelm the state's limited health-care capacity. Less ill patients bring a lower risk to burden hospitals, but pose a risk of infection to older or vulnerable people who could need medical care.

The state's report Monday includes 41 of the cases associated with a major outbreak among American Seafoods employees working together on the American Triumph, a 285-foot factory trawler at sea since it headed to Alaska for pollock fishing on June 27. The vessel is one of six owned by the Seattle-based company.

Eight-five crew members out of 119 have tested positive for COVID-19. Seven reported symptoms and were tested after they arrived in Unalaska last week, with six testing positive. Another 79 tested positive in follow-up screening in Unalaska.

Before the Alaska voyage, all crew members quarantined for at least 14 days and passed all public health protocols in order to board the vessel, American Seafoods said in a statement.

American Triumph left Unalaska's port of Dutch Harbor on Sunday night with infected crew members and medical personnel on board. The boat is scheduled to arrive Wednesday in Seward, where the infected crew will be loaded directly onto buses waiting at the waterfront to travel to Anchorage for isolation and monitoring, Seward officials say.

Thirty-four crew who tested negative for the virus flew by charter from Unalaska to Anchorage, where they were expected to undergo quarantine and symptom monitoring.

The other seafood outbreak is centered in Juneau, where 35 processor employees have tested positive for COVID-19.

Alaska Glacier Seafoods screened 113 employees after nine employees tested positive last week, a cluster stemming from one employee infected through community spread, local officials said over the weekend. Testing performed in coordination with the City and Borough of Juneau revealed another 26 positive results Saturday night. The state reported 21 new Juneau cases in nonresidents and one new case in a resident Monday. It wasn't clear how many of the new cases reflected the Glacier Seafoods outbreak.

The new record high tops the state's prior record for daily cases -- established a day earlier, on Sunday -- that saw 119 new infections statewide.

Local officials in Ketchikan also reported two new cases in that Southeast city in addition to the state's tally, including one in a seafood worker.

The worker, as part of the company's mitigation plan, was tested upon arriving in Ketchikan and came up positive when tested again Monday, according to a Ketchikan Gateway Borough release. The person has no symptoms, and is now in isolation and under monitoring.

The other case reported in Ketchikan Monday was a traveler, also experiencing no symptoms, who tested positive through airport screening, officials say.

There were 1,563 people with active coronavirus infections around the state as of Monday out of a total of 2,414 reported since the pandemic began in March. The state's three-day average testing positivity rate -- the number of positive tests per total performed -- rose to 2.5%, the highest it's been since mid-April but still overall a relatively low number compared to many other states. Officials here acknowledge Alaska's testing rates are higher than many because of the state's early aggressive testing efforts but also a high proportion of screening tests for workers and travelers that can skew positivity calculations.

New cases were reported Monday in 49 Anchorage residents and 3 people from Chugiak; 1 person in Homer, 2 in Kenai, 1 in Seward and 1 in a smaller community on the northern Kenai Peninsula; 1 in the Denali Borough; 7 in Fairbanks; 2 in Palmer and 5 in Wasilla; and 1 in Bristol Bay and Lakes and Peninsula boroughs.

Link: <https://www.adn.com/alaska-news/2020/07/20/alaskas-daily-coronavirus-count-surges-to-new-high-driven-partly-by-seafood-industry-outbreaks/>

5. With Warm Hearts, Alaska City is Housing its Homeless – And It May Be The ‘Nicest Place’ in America

Good News Network by Good News Network/July 20

A city known for its cold climate is warming hearts by ensuring its residents are safe during the coronavirus crisis—and that includes everyone in the remote city of nearly 300,000, especially the homeless.

“Since COVID-19 our community has come together—and it’s an amazing transformation that I never thought I would see,” said Sandy Cannon, the resident who submitted her city’s story to Reader’s Digest. “People are supporting local businesses, the homeless population is finally being cared for, and city leaders are stepping up and making us all proud.”

When Alaska issued its “hunker down” order due to the novel coronavirus, the staff at Catholic Social Services knew they needed to act quickly to get the homeless population of Anchorage off the streets and out of crowded shelters to stem the disease’s spread.

That meant finding private places for as many homeless as possible.

“We knew that getting these individuals into their own residences was going to be the safest option,” says Molly Cornish, community engagement director at the local Catholic Social Services.

So CSS staff worked around the clock to find hundreds of homes. But their success created a new problem: those being rehoused often lacked the necessities that so many take for granted. Soap, toothpaste and—of course—toilet paper.

A call for help on social media was picked up by Coronavirus Days of Caring, a new Facebook group of Anchorage residents. They collaborated with a local business that has an ongoing partnership with CSS, the Hotel Captain Cook, to start a drive. Residents could drop off necessities with the hotel bellmen to be distributed to a newly housed person.

Not only that; for every selfie taken during the drop-off, the hotel would give a \$10 tip to staffers who had temporarily lost their jobs due to the pandemic.

When the drive concluded, two massive box trucks full of household items had been gathered. Catholic Social Services now had everything they needed for anyone who walked through their front door.

“People were so generous,” says Cornish. “It was so wonderful to see.”

A peaceful march on June 5 to protest the death of George Floyd also inspired similar steps to help community members.

After the 1,000 residents gathered, a local art gallery launched a social-distancing charity event featuring photos of the protests. “The turnout was fantastic,” says Jovell Rennie, co-owner of Akela Space. “People just kept coming to support and donate.” And they raised \$23,000 for groups serving Black and Native residents.

Cannon says such generosity is the kind of thing locals do automatically for neighbors in need. She credits the kindness of her 70-something neighbor, Charlotte, with making sure she and her husband both survived the quarantine, given their high-risk immune systems. Cannon is a 65-year-old with asthma and high blood pressure, while her husband has Crohn’s disease, pre-diabetes, and lung issues. Charlotte repeatedly picked up their medications whenever they were ready at the pharmacy, and frequently made other stops.

“I would say something offhand, like ‘Oh, I need flour,’ and magically the next day flour would arrive on my doorstep,” Cannon says. “It was like the flour fairy had come! Flour, sugar, toilet paper—the surprises kept coming.”

“She’s just always there, when there’s no payoff in it for her. She does it out of the kindness of her heart.”

Link: <https://www.goodnewsnetwork.org/anchorage-alaska-is-housing-its-homeless-2020-nicest-place-contest/>

6. More restrictions may be on the horizon, Anchorage mayor says of continued COVID-19 response
KTVA by Daniella Rivera, Samantha Davenport/July 17

Officials in Anchorage say the recent rise in new cases of COVID-19 has cut the estimated time for intensive care units to reach capacity in half — from 20 weeks down to 10.

The estimate was shared in a community address Friday with Anchorage Mayor Ethan Berkowitz. Ahead of the briefing, public health officials announced a new exposure location: F Street Station. The exposure date is July 10.

Berkowitz was joined during the announcement by public health leaders, including:

- Dr. Tom Hennessy, medical doctor and infectious disease epidemiologist, University of Alaska Anchorage College of Health
- Christy Lawton, Public Health Division manager at the Anchorage Health Department
- Dr. Bruce Chandler, medical officer with Disease Prevention and Control at the health department

Lawton said from July 9 to July 15, there were 231 new cases — the highest weekly count yet. Of those cases, 28 were attributed to travel to Alaska.

“We are significantly stretched,” Lawton said.

Within the Municipality of Anchorage, Lawton said COVID-19 has been seen in virtually every type of community setting.

“People are picking it up everywhere, it's an incredibly dangerous time,” she said.

The city's website on Friday listed 482 active cases in the municipality with 347 cases considered recovered and a total of 838 confirmed cases.

Contact tracing need exceeding city's public health capacity

The municipality has been measuring its response capacity in three areas: epidemiology, health care capacity and public health capacity. Epidemiology and health care capacity showed green and yellow lights Friday morning, with public health capacity in red.

Transmission needs to be reduced by 30% to get the pandemic under control, Hennessy said. A month ago, Alaska needed to reduce transmission by 10%.

He also noted that Alaskans have had increased contact with those outside their bubble since March and April. In those months, contact tracers would need to get in contact with five or six people, but are now having to reach out to closer to 30.

“The longer we wait to act, the stronger our interventions are gonna have to be,” Hennessy said.

A week prior, officials said Anchorage's ability to conduct contact investigations was operating beyond max capacity, leading to one- and two-day delays in making initial contact with newly confirmed patients to trace who they might have come into contact with.

Last week, Chandler said contact tracers have encountered individuals who are unwilling to cooperate with the health department after testing positive. Some have refused to share what they've been doing and who they might have exposed and some have failed to follow quarantine guidelines.

They are currently monitoring 913 cases as well as contact tracing, but the state and municipality are already stretched thin.

Concerns about future hospital bed availability

As of July 16, Lawton said 21 people have been hospitalized.

Hennessy said that he and his team have been using a COVID-19 surge tool, a spreadsheet from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that helps predict future health care capacity, to measure cases in Anchorage. They ran a comparison comparing July 12 with early June, which he said showed that the pandemic has worsened.

"We could run out of intensive care unit beds in Anchorage by Sept. 22," Hennessy said.

As the number of active cases continues to grow, the predicted time until Anchorage's ICU capacity has been cut in half from 20 weeks to 10.

Chandler said not all young adults contracting COVID-19 are healing unscathed — he notes that younger adults are still being hospitalized.

'We have to do something'

The mayor said in Friday's press conference he anticipates some policy restrictions and additional orders next week.

"We're in a position now where we have to do something because the disease is moving through the community differently," Berkowitz said.

Just a week before, he spoke about the challenges presented in trying to use data coming in to determine the path forward.

"We are seeing a spike in cases," said Berkowitz during a news briefing on July 10, "and you know, one of the challenges that we have with dealing with COVID is the information we gather is retrospective. We learn what happened two days, four days, six days ago, and the decisions we make are prospective. We have to figure out what the trends are going to be so we can interrupt those trends if they're negative and prevent the disease from spreading so we can flatten the curve."

Looming on the horizon is school in the fall, as many parents and caregivers are trying to figure out how to manage both remote work and education of children come late August.

The mayor also noted Friday that \$10 million of CARES Act money has been allotted to child care assistance.

The city is under a mandatory masking order through July 31, which could be extended. Gov. Mike Dunleavy has opted to rely on Alaskans statewide making voluntary efforts to slow the spread of the disease.

Link: <https://www.ktva.com/story/42382408/anchorage-mayor-health-officials-give-community-update-on-covid19-response>

—NATION/NATIONAL GUARD NEWS OF INTEREST—

7. National Guard COVID-19 Response

Wisconsin Guard surpasses 250,000 COVID-19 tests collected; Task Force helps Virginia respond to COVID-19 pandemic; WVNG helps meet increased demand for testing, PPE

Latest news articles: <https://www.nationalguard.mil/coronavirus/>

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